DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 347 993 IR 015 730

AUTHOR Harris, Duncan
TITLE Learners' and Instructors' Roles in the Learning Environment.
PUB DATE Feb 92
NOTE 8p.; In: Proceedings of Selected Research and Development Presentations at the Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology and Sponsored by the Research and Theory Division; see IR 015 706.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adoption (Ideas); Computer Software; Expectation; *Instructional Design; Student Attitudes; *Student Role; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Learning Environment

ABSTRACT

This discussion of the potential roles of learners and instructors as they affect the learning environment argues that the roles of teachers and learners are the key issues rather than learning styles. It begins by discussing the roles of learners as receivers, detectives (problem solvers), generators (developers of new ideas), and facilitators (enabling other learners to succeed). The instructors' roles are then addressed: the conductor, who is helping a group of learners who may all be doing different learning activities at the same time; the composer, or designer of the learning; and the critic, or evaluator of learner's work and the learning process. Three key issues are also discussed: mismatches in the expectations of the instructor and learners; the attitudes of the instructor and learners; and communicability, i.e., provision of manuals for computer software that provide clear communication to the instructors and learners. It is concluded that the learning environment is dependent on the roles of the learners and of the instructors, that the design of instruction needs to take into account the current expectations of the learners in their own environment, and that the design needs to enable instructors and learners to become accustomed to any changes in their roles. Questions for the designer relating to the roles of the instructors and the learners are appended. (7 references) (BBM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED347993

Title:

Learners' and Instructor's Roles in the Learning Environment

Author:

Duncan Harris

112015730

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Michael Simonson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Learners' and Instructors' Roles in the Learning Environment

Duncan Harris

Introduction

The other two contributors are focusing on the physical facilities of the environment. I would like to look at the human aspects of the environment. Obviously learning styles are an important aspect, but I would suggest that the roles of teachers and learners are the key issues not learning styles. In the limited time I am missing out the more global institutional and organisational factors which are also key factors. I shall concentrate on the learning environment.

In the learning environment learners and instructors will have certain expectations of their roles from previous experience. So, for example, learners in an armed services environment may be used to a passive role, with the instructors perceived not only as the experts but also the controllers of discipline.

I would like to explore a simple idea of the potential roles of learners and instructors as they affect the learning environment.

Learners Roles

The focus is roles, although there is a relationship with learning styles and approaches. Learning can occur in any combination of skills, cognitive learning, attitudes and cooperation (ie inter-personal skills). I would like to look at four roles of learners (Harris and Bell, 1990)

Receiver

Detective

Generator

Facilitator

The learner as RECEIVER may be: listening to somebody talking (it could be the instructor, another learner), watching somebody performing a skill, observing the behaviour of a person in a group. The role is generally a silent role and is a clear expectation in a didactic learning environment. (It has some relationship to declarative learning, Rumelhart and Norman, 1981)

The learner as DETECTIVE has a problem to solve, the solution may not be part of the detective role. That problem could be: how to enable a member of a group to play a more active part in the group, how to go about the manipulation of a piece of wood to bring about a particular shape with a particular set of machines and tools, how to solve a new mathematical problem. The role is a more active role, where there is an expectation for the learner to take some responsibility for the learning. A different learning environment will be needed to enable this to occur. The learner has to be aware of the different expectations. (It is related to procedural learning, Rumelhart and Norman, 1981).

The learner as GENERATOR is trying to be creative, developing new ideas, new relationships, new skills. It is a role with even more responsibility. A role often excluded in many courses in higher education where credits can be obtained for repeating what was received. (It is associated with generative learning, Wittrock, 1974).

The learner as FACILITATOR is probably the most advanced role where the learner is about enabling other learners to succeed. The facilitation can occur in skills, cognitive learning, it can occur more obviously in cooperative learning. So often cooperative learning is assumed as an existing skill (for example asking learners to work together at a computer terminal), yet the role of learners need to be changed to that of facilitator to enable cooperative learning (see, for example, Slavin, 1983).

I would suggest to you that the designer not only has to be aware of the design expectations of learners' roles, but also what learners expectations are in the context of learning. If the learner expects to play the receiver role, then designing for the facilitator role has potential mismatches with the existing learning environment. There can also be constraints dictated by the learning environment: the strategy, materials, equipment may necessitate certain roles.

Instructors' Roles

Again the focus is on roles, this time for Instructors. I find a musical analogue useful in this context (Harris, 1979). The four roles are:

Performer

Conductor

Composer

Critic

Let us explore these roles in more detail. The PERFORMER is the didactic presenter (my current role), although I can play the role in the written word, at a piece of equipment or manipulating a group! However the last is perhaps not part of this role!

The CONDUCTOR role is the instructor who is helping a group of learners who may all be doing different learning activities at the same time. The conductor ensures that all the learners have help as needed and also takes them on to new learning activities as necessary. The learning activities can be anything from maths through science experiments to drama rehearsals. The design for the learning activity is very dependent on the role of the instructor.

The COMPOSER is more obvious as the designer of the learning, usually for that group of learners or only those groups with whom the instructor comes into contact. I suppose the ultimate composer is the designer of curricular resources which will be used in any institutions perhaps across states, but I have restricted the role to those who are mainly instructors. Obviously if there is a learning environment where the instructors are used to the role of composer then it is important for designers to incorporate some part of this role in the design.

The CRITIC role is that of the evaluator of learners' work, of the learning process.

Expectations

There are expectations from learners and from instructors in any learning environment. Returning to the example from the armed services, the expectations of the learners and of the instructors would be for the learners to take the receiver role and for the instructors to take the performer role. Any learning design which changes these expectations needs careful incorporation of enabling the instructors and learners to take up new roles. It is insufficient to just present a total change in the expectations of roles. It will be necessary to provide assistance to the instructors for the new role and also for the learners for the new role. Designers need to incorporate such resources, guidance and assistance to enable the new approach to be taken on with a gradual gain in confidence rather than a step function change. The intention of any design is to enable commitment from the instructors and the learners to the new approach. That commitment an only occur when there is a deliberate effort in the design to help the learners and the instructors.

The three key issues (Tessmer and Harris, 1992) that arise are

Mismatches

Attitudes

Communicability

The idea of MISMATCHES has already been identified in the previous paragraph. If there are mismatches in the expectations of the instructors and learners, then it is unlikely that the design will be effective in the learning environment. Mismatches for instructors are probably more influential in providing a barrier to the implementation of the design. Mismatches with learners may present ineffective learning unless there is considerable commitment from the instructors.

The ATTITUDES of instructor and learners are the crucial aspects which will enable or prevent successful outcomes from the design. The designer is always looking for commitment from instructors and learners, but there is also a need to enable the commitment by careful incorporation of persuasion and development during the actual learning process (learning for both instructor and the learners about the changed expectations).

In order to enable the change in attitudes the design must incorporate COMMUNICABILITY. There is little point in having a carefully designed guide for instructors which puts them off at the first stage...many of us will be familiar with early (and more recent) manuals for computer software which make unreasonable assumptions about the knowledge of the user. It is essential that there is a clear communication to the instructors and the learners.

Conclusion

The learning environment is dependent on the roles of the learners and of the instructors. The design needs to take account of the current expectations of the learners in their own environment (Harris and Tessmer, 1990). If there is to be a change in role for the instructors and/or the learners then the design needs to enable the instructors and the learners to become accustomed to those roles (You may find the list of questions in Appendix A helpful during design processes). Unless there is a commitment to the approach there is likely to be a poor reception for the new approaches and resources. Not only does there need to be a commitment from the instructors and the learners but also from the organisation and the institution,....but that is another story!.

References

Harris N D C (1979) **Preparing Educational Materials** London, Croom Helm.

Harris D, Bell C (1990) **Evaluating and Assessing for Learning** London, Kogan Page.

Harris N D C, Tessmer M A (1990) Environmental Analysis: How do You Catch the Learner? **Educational and Training Technology, 27,** 4, 350-364.

Rumelhart D E, Norman D A (1981) Analogical processes in learning in Anderson J R (Ed) **Cognitive Skills and their Acquisition** Hillsdale NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Slavin R E (1983) **Cooperative Learning** New York, Longman.

Tessmer M, Harris D (1992) **Analysing the Instructional Setting: Environmental Analysis** London, Kogan Page.

Wittrock M C (1974) Learning as a generative activity **Educational Psychologist, 11,** 87-95.

Copyright Duncan Harris 1992.

Appendix A

QUESTIONS FOR THE DESIGNER RELATING TO THE ROLES OF THE INSTRUCTORS AND OF THE LEARNERS. (Tessmer & Harris, 1992)

What are the expectations from the learners in the learning environment?

- How are they expected to do the learning?
- When are they expected to do the learning?
- What responsibilities are they expected to take?

Can the learning environment support variations in the learners' role?

- Why are the learners doing the learning?
- What do they expect to learn?
- How do they expect to learn?
- Where do they expect to do the learning?
- What responsibilities do they expect to take?

What are the expectations from the instructor in the learning environment?

- How are instructors expected to help learners?
- When are instructors expected to help learners?
- What is the division of responsibility between the instructors and the learners?

Can the learning environment support variations in the instructors' role?

- What expectations do instructors have from their contract of employment?
- What contact do instructors have with learners?
- What responsibilities are instructors expected to give to learners?
- What role would instructors prefer to play?

The answers to these questions will determine the design of the learning. By using explicit statements of these expectations the designer has a key framework as a basis for the design. The learners may wish to choose between alternatives where they have the teaching done ON them, the teaching done WITH them or the teaching done BY them. If the learners expect to go to a course where everything is done for them and find that they are expected to work in self motivated syndicates negotiating their own goals etc, they may feel cheated relative to their expectations. To prevent this, it is essential that the designer collects information to enable the decisions to meet the expectations of the instructors and learners or to identify the needs for communication or persuasion to make the innovation feasible. To collect this information the designer should keep the following principles in mind:

- *Site visits are essential.*
- *For young learners talk with them to find out what they say that they like.*

- *For older learners use group techniques (eg snowball technique).*

- *For instructors the snowball technique is also applicable.*

- *Surveys of learner and instructor opinions can be used to generalise the data from the group techniques.*

- *Observation of the current practices of instructors and learners will provide further evidence and ensure triangulation.*

COPYRIGHT Duncan Harris 1992.